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*Critically Examined*



*By a Dean.*





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**‘THE GATES AJAR’**

**CRITICALLY EXAMINED.**



# 'THE GATES AJAR'

*by E. L. Phelps*

CRITICALLY EXAMINED.

By A DEAN.



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# **‘THE GATES AJAR’**

**CRITICALLY EXAMINED.**

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**IF in the present day any person has a favourite scheme, or theory, or doctrine to propound, the most ready mode he can adopt to promote the circulation of his opinions, especially in the religious world, is to write a story-book. It must also, we fear, be a picture-book, or it will not be acceptable, nor suit the superficial taste of the age. An enigmatical or startling title, too, is a fashion-**

able qualification, like 'Gates Ajar.' So recommended, it is in a fair way to popular favour.

That this American publication, so entitled, should have obtained a wide circulation even among some religious persons, does not speak well for the discrimination of its readers. It is simply a second-rate sensational novel, professedly of a religious character, but betraying so much positive error, and treating serious subjects in such a flip-pant, unhallowed strain, that no small amount of Christian charity is required to avoid the conclusion, that 'an enemy hath done this !'

The argument of this book, underlying its narrative and divested of its

drapery, appears to be this :—That the ordinary received opinions of the final happiness of the blessed are vague, cold, and unsatisfactory ; that the hopes and prospects of future glory which have sustained and comforted the departing saints ever since Christ came, are vapid, unsubstantial, unreal ;—that they are actually offensive to the bereaved heart ; utterly insufficient to supply the place of loved ones departed ; leaving the sufferer stunned and prostrate, and refusing to be comforted ; and that, considered generally, the orthodox views of heaven present nothing real, substantial, and captivating to the expectant minds of men.

To remedy this error it is suggested

that the condition of our future eternal happiness should be clothed with the garb of our present state and nature—perpetuating and intensifying our human affections. Mourners are to be comforted, not by the application of scriptural promises, not by a realising sense of the love of Christ in chastening them,—nor are they taught to kiss the hand that afflicts them, raising their sorrowing souls from the fading things of earth to those of heaven,—but by turning heaven into earth, materialising, humanising, rationalising heaven, so as to make a spiritual state palatable to the natural man. Heaven is to be rendered attractive to children, by assuring them that they will find new

playthings there ; to the young and gay, by telling them that they will laugh and joke there ; to the recently bereaved, by persuading them not only that a renewed intercourse with those they love, with all the familiar earthly accompaniments, awaits them there, but that their departed ones are already their ministering angels, with whom they may have intercourse, and actually converse, even now ; landing us at last in most unquestionable spiritualism ! All this and much more must be made evident to our readers by quotations from the work itself, which we produce with much reluctance. We regard the opinions inculcated as erroneous and dangerous, and the mode of

illustrating them as offensive, in a startling degree, to all our religious feelings. A work so unscriptural, and yet so generally tolerated, demands the consideration of the 'Christian Observer.'

The chief heroines of this story are these:—A young lady of four-and-twenty has imbibed a romantic attachment for a brother, who is killed in one of the American battles; she becomes a mourner in hopeless despondency. An aunt, but little older than herself, is the recent widow of a missionary, but has found abundant consolation in her widowhood from the peculiar views which it is the object of this book to establish. This lady becomes the spiritual instructress of the niece, who ultimately closes the

eyes of her much-loved and sainted teacher—the deathbed scenes being intended to represent the final triumph of this sensational and sensuous creed.

Mary Cabot, the bereaved sister, who is supposed to relate her own experience chiefly in the form of a journal, draws a sufficiently gloomy picture of her own state of mind under this sudden dispensation of Providence. She gives herself up to hopeless despair. She says:—

‘I am shut up and walled in, as I think people must feel shut up and walled in, in hell!’ (p. 7.) ‘It is horrible! it was cruel! Roy [the familiar name for her brother], all I had in the wide world . . . snatched away by a



*dreadful God*—laid out there in the cold snow. He must be gone to heaven ; but I know nothing about heaven. It is very far off. In my best and happiest days I never liked to think of it. If I could go there it could do me no good, for I should not see Roy. Or if I did, he would not be the old, dear Roy. I should grow so tired of singing ;'

and she quotes the following stanza :—

“O mother, mother, what is heaven ?  
O mother, what is hell ?  
To be with Wilhelm—that's my heaven !  
Without him—that's my hell !”

Indulging such ungovernable feelings as these—and there is much more of the same kind—her conclusion about herself appears to be a just one :—

‘I do not see how one with such thoughts in her heart as I have can possibly be “regenerate,” or stand any chance of ever becoming “one of the redeemed.” And here I am, what I have been for six years, a member of an Evangelical Church in good and regular standing!’

Further on she exclaims,—

‘Roy, away in that *dreadful* heaven, can have no thought of me, left alone. The singing and worshipping must take up all his time. God wants it all—He is a jealous God. I am nothing any more to Roy! . . . God forgive the words, but heaven will never be heaven to me without him!’

Indulging such idolatry as this, and loving the creature more than the Crea-

tor, she might well be doubtful of her spiritual state. Had she ever read the words of that Saviour, whose 'humanity' is made suspiciously prominent in these pages, 'If any man love father or mother or wife or child more than me, he cannot be my disciple?' Did she ever hear the exclamation of one under a darker dispensation, who nevertheless could say, 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee?' If this be true; if this be the ordinary experience of a believer; if this be the conquest of faith,—then the whole purport and object of this book is fiction and fable—a delusive dream—the baseless fabric of a vision; for the idolatry of the crea-

ture is set up, vindicated, justified, and almost sanctified, from the beginning to the end of this work.

It is not necessary that we should disfigure our pages with examples of the sarcastic irony with which the authoress of this work clothes the vulgar and blundering attempts of 'Deacon Quirk,' and other less distinguished persons, who are represented as putting the mourner's feelings to the rack, by their rude attempts to comfort her with the ordinary common-place truths of the Gospel. To pour ridicule and contempt upon those blessed truths is the painful result.

But these exaggerated pictures of romantic grief, and of these miserable

comforters, are intended as a foil, or as the dark background of the picture, preparatory to the introduction of the Madonna of the tale, the angel of light—the aunt—Mrs. M. ; who now appears on the scene as a visitor, and ultimately as a resident, at her niece's house. She takes an early opportunity of introducing her strange views to her niece, artfully intermingling them with admitted truths. The ill-regulated and distracted mind of the young lady too readily imbibed the poison.

The first lesson was given on a received opinion.

“It is not as if you were never going to see him again.” I looked bewildered. “What is the matter,

dear?" "Why, do you think I shall see him again—really see him?" "You might as well ask me if I thought God made you and Roy, and gave you to each other. See him! Why, of course you will see him as you saw him here." "As I saw him here? Why, here I looked into his eyes; I saw him smile; I touched him. Why, Aunt Winifred, Roy is an angel." She patted my hand with a little, soft, comforting laugh.'

As much as to say, What a child you are, and what fools all ordinary Christians are! And so, after much more in the same strain, the first lesson learned was this,—

'Roy my own again—not only to look at standing up among the singers, —but close to me; somehow or other

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to be as near as—to be nearer than—he was here, *really mine again!* I shall never let this go.' (p. 45.)

Here, as all through the story, 'Roy' is heaven, and heaven is Roy! An obvious error is noticeable here; it frequently occurs in this work. The separate, or intermediate state after death, when the soul is apart from the body, among 'the spirits of just men made perfect,' is either ignored, or confounded with the final condition when it is reunited with the Resurrection-body. In fact, the real and actual resurrection of the body is subsequently eliminated; and, like the Day of Judgment, it is treated quite hypothetically, though not actually denied.

If it be true, as the Universal Church believes, that the *spirits* only of just men made perfect abide together in the Paradise of God after death until the Resurrection-day, the whole theory of this speculative book is utterly dissipated. Her 'Roy,' in his bodily form,—as she 'saw and touched' and handled him in this world,—cannot await her coming in a world of spirits, as here described. And the subsequent speculations of what occurs in the future state become unspeakably offensive and degrading to the subject.

Some ten pages are then occupied in satirical observations on the sermon of a godly man, who, of course, differs from these enlightened ladies, and especially



from Aunt Winifred, . Here are some of her oracular teachings. Recognition of earthly friends in heaven is not

“merely probable, it is sure. If I could find no proof of it” (in the Bible), “I should none the less believe it, as long as I believe in God.” “Why?” “Because God made Roy and you to love each other on earth; and to suppose he did this for a few years, not intending you to love in heaven, would be, what Madame de Gasparin calls, fearful irony in God.”

Language of fearful profaneness! And this is her argument :—

“Be sure, as you are sure of him” (Roy), “that we shall be ourselves in heaven. Would you be yourself, not to recognise Roy? Consequently, not

to love Roy ; for to love and be separated is misery, and heaven is joy !”

And where is Christ, and where is God, in all these sublimities ? Alas ! the chorus is still the same,—Roy is heaven, and heaven is Roy.

But Aunt Winifred produces what she calls scriptural proofs of her views : and lamentable samples they are of the utter perversion or absurd application of texts and facts of Scripture abounding in this book. Because ‘many are to come from the east and west, &c., to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob :’ ‘Will they,’ she flippantly asks, ‘be likely to mistake them for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego ?’ Without irreverence, we would suggest that they

would be alike strangers to both parties, and would require a mutual introduction ! There could be no *recognition*—if the authoress understands the meaning of that word—where there had not been previous acquaintance. 'Did not Peter, and others, know Moses and Elias, when they saw them transfigured ?' We answer, How did they know them ? Certainly not by recognition. Did not the beggar recognise Abraham ? Did he know him before ? Worse than this, she argues that Mary will know her Roy, and she will know her John, in heaven, because it is said, 'We are risen *together*, sitting *together* at the right hand of God, sitting *together* in heavenly places ;' because believers are 'heirs of God, and

joint heirs with Christ ;' because Christ says of His people, 'I will that they be with me where I am,' and 'that they may be one as we are.'

Now every spiritual believer knows that these terms can refer only to brothers and sisters in Christ—to those who are united to Him by faith in the family of God. To apply them, therefore, to mere natural relatives, indicates a surprising degree of spiritual blindness. It seems incredible that this book can have been read and approved by truly religious persons; if so, they could not possibly have discovered its true object. Pursuing the same argument, she cites the oft-mistaken passage, 'I shall go to him;' that is, to the grave: 'but he

shall not return to me ;' that is, never live again in this world. To interpret this otherwise, is to give it a meaning which David himself at that day did not understand.

The frequent quotations from authors of a sceptical cast of mind, suggest a suspicion that the original author of this work must be anything but a sound Christian believer ; and the painful levity in which she indulges, points in the same direction. After glancing (p. 65) at the Day of Judgment, 'whatever the Judgment Day may mean,' she reduces her doctrine to the following fearful speculations :—

“ I mean to say that if there is such a thing as common sense, you will talk

with Roy as you talked with him here.”  
... I laid my head upon her shoulder,  
and could hardly speak for the comfort  
she gave me. “Yes, I believe we shall  
talk, and laugh, and joke, and play.”  
“Laugh and joke in heaven!” “Why  
not?” “But it seems so wicked and  
irreverent, and all that, you know!”

At that moment the little girl comes  
in, and auntie illustrates her subject by  
assuring her niece that if that child died,  
she would go to heaven just as she was  
—‘with all her little sins forgiven—  
laughing and playing;’ and she con-  
cludes her argument by the following  
poetical profanity:—

‘Does nobody laugh then, where he has gone?  
This man of the smile and the jest?’

So the King’s Fool is to perpetuate

his folly in heaven. And with incredible perversity this is justified by the fact, 'that David danced before the Lord with all his might ;' and the Bible says—

“ Rejoice in the Lord ! Make a joyful noise unto Him ! Give thanks unto the Lord, for His mercy endureth ! ” —a Bible which exhausts its splendid wealth of rhetoric to make us understand that the coming life is a life of *joy*, no more threatens to make nuns than mutes of us. I expect that you will hear some of Roy's very old jokes, see the sparkle in his eye, listen to his laughing voice, lighten up the happy days as gleefully as you may choose ; and that —— ’

‘ How pleasant,—how pleasant this is ! I never supposed before that God would let any one laugh in heaven. ’

‘I wonder if Roy has seen the President. Aunt Winifred says she does not doubt it. She thinks that all the soldiers must have crowded up to meet him, and “Oh,” she says, “what a sight to see!”’ (p. 67.)

This is little better than the ravings of a maniac ; if it be not the ridicule of an unbeliever.

That there is a sensible union and personal intercourse between the departed and their friends in this world, is the next heresy propounded ; and Aunt Winifred teaches and practises pure Spiritualism.\* The ladies wander into

\* Since this was written, a more recent story-book by the same author has reached us ; entitled ‘Men, Women, and Ghosts’ (Sampson Low, London) ; in which spirit-rapping, and all its wretched delusions,



Roy's garden : it looked neglected ; but, said the pupil,—

“I don't suppose it makes any difference to him.” “I do not feel sure of that.” “What do you mean?” “I do not feel sure that anything he has left makes no difference to him.” “But I don't understand. He is in heaven . . . . he would not care for anything that is going on in this woe-ful world.” “Perhaps that is so,” she said, smiling a sweet contradiction to her words ; “but I don't believe it.” “What do you believe?”

are authenticated as credible exhibitions ; and the authoress still further betrays herself by fresh perversions of the Word of God, of such a profane character that we could not transfer them to our pages. If any pious persons have been duped by '*Gates Ajar*,' their eyes must be sufficiently opened by this mischievous publication.

A very pertinent question—and one which many thoughtful persons will ask when they read this book. But the aunt's answer creates a thrill in the mind; she ventures to use oracularly the very words of Jesus: 'I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.' She admits that her notions are only 'conjecture,' yet she propounds them, not only as a firm believer in them, but as one having a special revelation. She teaches that our dead are—

“only out of sight,—not lost, nor asleep, nor annihilated, they go on loving. To love must mean to care for, to hope for, to pray for, nor less out of a body than in it;” then, speak-

ing low, "I cannot doubt that our absent dead are very present with us."

And by what is such a vague and groundless hope sustained? Because 'Jesus said, I am with you always.' Another unhallowed fearful perversion of God's Word. Because the Lord of heaven and earth promised to be with His people to the end of the world, therefore 'John' and 'Roy,' the deceased husband and brother, are with these ladies always. Is this wilful, or ignorant mal-appropriation of Holy Writ? Nor is this all;—she attempts to prove that, because angels are 'ministering spirits,' the departed souls are likewise so! And thus irreverently, illogically, and unscripturally, she writes,—

“God works by the use of means,” as the preachers say. Why not use Roy as well as Gabriel? What arch-angel could understand and reach the peculiarities of your nature as he could? or, even if understanding, could so love and bear with you? What is to be done? Will they send Roy to the planet Jupiter to take care of somebody else’s sister?”

It is hard to believe that the hand that writes this can be the hand of a Christian.

‘But the Bible, Aunt Winifred?’—aye, well may the pupil say the Bible; —‘The Bible does not say a great deal on this point, but it does not contradict me.’ It would be strange if all such vain and delusive speculations were con-

tradicted: but the spirit of the whole Bible, all its spiritual promises, condemn these expectations as forgeries. And then follows a description of the offices of angels, and the commentators are denounced *en masse* as 'stupid,' for confining these works to angels, according to God's Word, and not seeing that the spirits of the departed were included, or intended, according to this lady's word. Adding, 'an east wind is as much an angel as Michael.' At length, as they sat both of them by Roy's grave, the sister says,—

“ Then you think, you really think, that Roy remembers, and loves, and takes care of me; that he has been

listening, perhaps, and is—why, you don't think he may be *here*?"

"Yes, I do. Here, close beside you all this time, trying to speak to you through the blessed sunshine and the flowers, trying to help you and sure to love you,—right here, dear. I do not believe God means to send him away from you, either."

'My heart was too full to answer her. Seeing how it was, she slipped away, and strolling out of sight, with her face to the eastern hills, left me alone.

'And yet I did not seem alone. The low branches swept with a little soft sigh across the grave; the May flowers wrapped me in with fragrance thick as incense; the tiny sparrow turned her soft eyes at me over the edge of the nest, and chirped contentedly; the "blessed sunshine"

talked with me as it touched the edges of the ivy-leaves to fire.

'I cannot write it, even here, how these things stole into my heart and hushed me. If I had seen him standing by the stainless cross, it would not have frightened or surprised me. There—not dead or gone, but *there*—it helps me and makes me strong!' (p. 78.)

Amidst this ritualism of nature and sickly fanaticism, Mary fancies she hears her brother Roy calling her by her familiar title—'Mamie! little Mamie!' 'Oh, Roy, I will try to bear it all if you will only stay!' If this is 'balm,' it is not 'the balm which is in Gilead, nor the Physician who is there.'

That the sceptical and superstitious aunt practises her own principles, be-

comes evident in a following page, when some little domestic difficulty having arisen, in which both the ladies need advice, accosting her niece, Aunt Winifred says:—‘I have been talking it over with them all the afternoon; it seems to be what they want.’ ‘With them?’ I started at the words!’ as well she might. But she comforts herself: ‘Ah! it is simply real to her—who, indeed, but her Saviour and her husband!’

So this Christian widow had been talking over a matter of household arrangement with her dead husband and Jesus. One shudders to copy such language; and again, astonishment arises that any scripturally taught Christian



fails to throw such a book into the fire.

Her profane remarks upon the resurrection of the body are too sad to transfer to our pages. But to show into what depths of speculative folly the perversion of God's truth precipitates a writer, we have the following hypothesis, touching the resurrection of the body :—

‘I accept God's statement about it, which is as plain as words can make a statement. I do not know, and I do not care to know, how it is to be effected. God will not be at a loss for a way, any more than He is at a loss for a way to make His fields blossom every spring. For aught we know, some invisible compound of an annihilated body may hover, by a Divine

decree, around the site of death till it is wanted,—sufficient to preserve identity as strictly as a body can ever be said to preserve it ; and stranger things have happened. You remember the old Mohammedan belief in the one little bone which is imperishable.

‘ Murillo has one charming exception. I always take a secret delight in that little cherub of his, kicking the clouds in the right-hand upper corner of the Immaculate Conception ; he seems to be having a good time of it, in genuine baby-fashion. The truth is, that the ordinary idea, if sifted accurately, reduces our eternal personality to—*gas*.’  
(p. 93.)

And this she calls accepting God’s statement !

A little incident proves how readily

the niece had imbibed the frivolous views of heaven thus inculcated. Her hair had grown prematurely grey through sorrow; she cherishes her female vanity, by thinking 'that when she is in heaven she will have her pretty brown hair again.' (p. 103.)

Aunt Winifred pursues her speculations on the future state, and about these she has 'no doubt.' 'We shall sit down some summer afternoon in heaven, and laugh over our past little dreams.' 'We must have mountains and trees, though no sea, but rivers and little brooks, and flowers too, under my windows.' 'Windows in heaven?' Of course, there are houses or mansions there, and therefore windows. And 'her John'

also, her departed husband. 'I expect to have my beautiful home, and my husband, and Faith' (her little girl), 'as I had them here.' As Charles Lamb says, 'candle-light and fireside conversations, and innocent vanities and jests, and irony itself—do these things go out with life?' The pupil is somewhat startled by those silly and profane speculations, and timidly calls them 'heresies.'

“I do not see where the heresy lies. As I hold fast by the Bible, I cannot be in much danger.” “But,” replies the hesitating pupil, “you don’t glean your conjectures from the Bible.” “I conjecture nothing that the Bible contradicts . . . Why should we not have pretty things in heaven?”

And she ends her lesson with this folly and profaneness :—

‘ You don’t know how I amuse myself at night thinking this all over before I go to sleep ; wondering what one thing will be like, and another thing ; planning what I should like ; thinking that John has seen it all, and wondering if he is laughing at me because I know so little about it. I tell you, Mary, there’s a “deal o’ comfort in ’t,” as Phœbe says about her cup of tea.’

That any person of devout mind, or any truly godly person, could write thus flippantly on such topics, appears to us quite impossible !

In order further to propagate her mischievous opinions, Aunt Winifred

volunteers her services as a Sunday-school teacher, knowing well that her minister and all her church officers would be shocked at her daring vagaries. A disturbance is the natural result in the little society. It appears that she has been promising one child a pianoforte in heaven,—that she laughs to scorn all the common notions respecting that blessed place,—that she quotes Swedenborg, &c., and encourages the children to talk really profanely of ‘the world to come.’ She is consequently taken to task by the poor illiterate ‘Deacon Quirk,’ of whose pious but feeble reasonings, as before, she makes sport ; justifying her notion of pianos in heaven because there are ‘*harps*’ there, and

therefore why not pianos, or bagpipes, or anything else ! The poor Deacon is said 'to evade fair argument by a self-sufficient spasm of piety,' which convulsed one of these devout ladies with laughter. 'Auntie says it sounded like fourth-of-July crackers touched off under a wet barrel!'—thoughts and expressions which we might expect to meet with in the pages of the lowest cast of vulgar literature, but positively revolting to every feeling of propriety in the connexion in which they occur. The Deacon has a half-witted son, who falls an easy prey to Mrs. M.'s wild notions, being charmed by her assurance that he shall have some opportunity of perfecting himself in mechanism in heaven—the only art

he excelled in. Every one to his taste, even to digging potatoes. She thus sums up the heavenly occupations :—

‘I suppose the artist will paint his pictures; the poet sing his happy songs; the orator and author will not find their talents hidden in the eternal darkness of the grave; the sculptor will use his beautiful gift in the moulding of some heavenly Carrara.’

And this idle talk is supported by two quotations from Scripture,—‘As well the singer as the player on instruments shall be THERE!’ *Where?* In Jerusalem—in Mount Zion—*on this earth!* (Psalm lxxxvii. 7). This is another sample of the wilful perversion of God’s Word. The Psalmist is not alluding to heaven :



but this teacher quotes it as if it were a Divine sanction to her religious fables ! The other quotation is even worse,— ‘ Christ saith, He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it ! ’—intimating that this present life lost, shall be found again identically in heaven. Such perversions of Holy Scripture are very lamentable. But her speculations are not ended,—fertile in such musings ; and nothing more easy, when once the reins are laid on the neck of a carnal, morbid imagination :—

‘ Oh, think of it ! To have books and music in heaven ! ’ ‘ All that Art, the handmaid of the Lord, can do for us, I have no doubt will be done. Eternity will never become monotonous . . . .

‘ Perhaps,—this is just my fancying, —perhaps there will be whole planets turned into galleries of art, over which we may wander at will ; or into orchestral halls, where the highest possibilities of music will be realised to singer and to hearer. Do you know, I have sometimes had a flitting notion that music would be the language of heaven?’

‘ Perhaps we shall take journeys to Jupiter and to Saturn, and to the glittering haze of nebulæ, and to the site of ruined worlds, whose “extinct light is yet travelling through space.” Occupation for explorers there, you see!’

‘ You make me say with little Clo, “O, why I want to go!” every time I hear you talk.’

So these pious ladies desired to go to heaven, not as St. Paul did, ‘who desired

to depart and be with Christ,' but to be with their 'John' and their 'Roy,' amidst all the old amusements of earth and sense. Such degrading views of eternity are worthy rather of a Red Indian's expectation, than of a Christian's. The poor heathen, when he is dying, slays his favourite dog, who, with his best bow and arrows, is buried with him, fondly dreaming of the heavenly hunting-grounds where he hopes to join his ancestors! More rational far than the puerilities of this lady, who, having sagely observed that 'the principal joy of a child's life consists in eating,' naturally resolved never to tell her little girl that heaven *was a dinnerless eternity!*' (p. 145). With equal assurance she

affirms her conviction that, 'if a little boy who was crying for the top of his red balloon had at that moment died, he would have found a little balloon waiting for him in heaven !' And why not his favourite cat and dog also ? Impious speculation can hardly outdo this !

At the risk of wearying our readers, the last scenes of this self-deluded woman must not be passed over unnoticed. A pious poet has said, for once without sufficient caution,—

'Fools men may live, but fools they cannot die !'

But, were this a true story, the adage fails of its application. True it is that a few scattered sentences may be found in which some cold and distant reference to

Christ is made, as an object of esteem and preference; but there is no penitence, no conviction of sin, no clinging to Jesus, no bright hope of an immediate glory beyond the grave! When the Saviour is mentioned, it is always in a subordinate character. Her warm love, her heart, her hopes, and her anticipations, are centred in her departed husband. Hear the dying woman herself, who is supposed to be a matured and ripened Christian. She describes her heaven—her final blessedness—thus :

‘I should like to come back and build me a beautiful home in Kansas, —I mean in what was Kansas,—among the happy people and the familiar, transfigured spots where John

and I worked for God so long together. That—with my dear Lord to see and speak with every day—would be “Heaven our Home.” (p. 172.)

‘But more often we talk,’ says the niece, respecting herself and her departing aunt (p. 179), ‘of the life which is soon to begin ; of her husband and Roy ; of what she will try to say to Christ,’ &c. Her husband and Roy first—and then something about Christ ! ‘We talk of trees, and little brooks, and the treasures of art, and of a thousand such things.’ One sentence follows, which at first sight appears so unlike the whole drift of the work,—a spark of light in the surrounding dimness,—that it might suggest the hope that the visionary

D

dreams of this poor woman had not led her fatally away from Christ. Her biographer says :—

‘ But I notice lately that she more often and more quickly wearies of these things ; that she comes back, and comes back again, to some loving thought—as loving as a child’s—of Jesus Christ. He seems to be—as she once said she tried that He should be to Faith—her “ *best* friend.” ’

‘ Her best friend ! ’ That is all ! There is not one word, through all her death-bed scenes, of sorrow for sin ; no expression of her need of a sacrifice for sin—an atonement—a propitiation : no precious blood of Jesus Christ ; no sense of sin forgiven, of pardon sealed ;—in

fact, with one or two words perhaps omitted, it might be the death-bed of a Socinian !

To all appearance she died as she had lived, a deluded idolater—a worshipper of the creature. Just before her end she asked her niece, ‘whether she had any message for Roy.’ And shortly after, in the dim twilight of the evening, she kissed her niece. It was quite dark when she turned her face at last to the window,—‘John!’ she said, ‘Why John!’ and expired. Not Jesus—not Lord—not Saviour—but her idol. She thinks she sees him, or we are left to suppose she saw her ‘John.’ Oh, dark bewildered end of one who fancies she has consolation to pour into the bereaved and



wounded soul, which neither Christ, nor His Apostles, nor His Word ever authorised or revealed. She claims for herself that her capricious fancies are not contradicted, or specially condemned, in the Bible; but she seems to have forgotten that a curse is pronounced on those that *add* to God's Word, or 'who teach for doctrines the commandments of men.'

And this is all we can learn from the absurd idea that heaven's 'gates are set ajar!' The sooner we submit to the plain declaration of God's Word the better, and shut and bar these gates against idle curiosity. 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be.' Why then vainly, and perhaps impiously, speculate about

it? It is true St. John adds that though the gates are not ajar, and curiosity and inquisitiveness are shut out, yet we know something; we know this, 'that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is;'—the only two positive revelations of our future condition made known to us in God's Word. But neither of them are even so much as referred to in these pages. The paramount desire of these ladies was, not to see Him, but to see 'their John and their Roy;' and to create an imaginary heaven, as little different from earth as possible. 'Not a 'material heaven,' says Aunt Winifred, but a 'rational one.' These are one and the same thing; a rational heaven, one

formed by reason, and built on the lines of the human understanding, will be a rationalistic heaven—a sensuous, material, earthly heaven. What does the deluded pupil-niece say?

‘If Roy had not gone before, I should think no more, probably, about the coming life, than does the minister’s wife herself. But now—I cannot help it—that is the reality, this the dream; that the substance, this the shadow.’  
(p. 150.)

Thus many deceive themselves; they bring down heaven to their earthly feelings and notions, and then flatter themselves that they have realised heaven. But it is not the heaven of the Bible.

Such feelings as these ladies are repre-

sented to have indulged towards earthly relatives are incompatible with, nay, destructive of, that love to God, which is the first and great commandment, and that love to Him who bought us with His blood, which is the theme of the New Covenant.

‘Lovest thou me more than these?’ said our Lord to the penitent Peter. How could the heroines of this story answer that question?

‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father!’—‘Let the dead bury their dead, but follow thou me,’ was His reply.

A touching and beautiful example of the due proportion of earthly and heavenly attachments in a believer, is

exhibited by two incidents in the Saviour's human life. None can doubt His perfect affection for His mother. Amidst the darkest scenes of that tragedy in which he was expiating the guilt of man, — amidst unequalled sufferings whilst upon the Cross,—He beheld His mother, and standing near her, His favourite disciple, John ; and He committed her to his care, saying, 'Behold thy mother ;' and to His mother He said, 'Behold thy son.' 'And that disciple took her to his own home.' Yet on a previous occasion, when that same mother and His brethren would interfere with His ministerial work, He exclaimed, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brethren ? For he that doeth the will of my Father which is in

heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother !' A feeling responded to by St. Paul,—‘to depart and be with Christ’—not with John and Roy—‘is far better.’

The true solution of all the plausible speculations and idle day-dreams of this mischievous book must be looked for, not in the head alone, but in the heart. The love of Christ in the heart will soon manifest that ‘expulsive power of a new affection’ of which the eloquent Chalmers spoke, expelling or subordinating all earthly affections even here, and rendering it quite impossible to indulge any desire to perpetuate and intensify them in Heaven. Without discussing the question of our mutual relations to each other

in a future state, we would submit one fact for the consideration of all who would thoughtfully examine this subject. It is this,—that not one word can be found in the entire New Testament, either in the way of promise or example, leading us to suppose that the happiness, either of the disembodied spirits immediately after death, in Paradise, or of the glorified souls and bodies of the saints in their final blessedness, is affected in any measure by a reunion with earthly relatives. In fact, nothing is recorded on the subject—a solemn silence which it is dangerous, and almost profane, to disturb. Faith rests on the all-sufficient promises of a God 'who has given us His Son,' and in and 'with Him freely

given us all things.' What those 'ALL THINGS' may be, none can imagine or conceive. But this is the very essence and soul of faith—to look for, expect, believe in, things unseen, unknown, unimagined. Like Abraham, we go forth towards heaven, as he went to a land of promise, 'not knowing whither he went.' All that we can see, and touch, and taste, and feel, must be of the earth, earthy; all the future glory, beginning and ending in 'Him whom no man hath seen nor can see,' is unseen, eternal. 'Whom, having not seen, we love. In whom, though now we *see* Him *not*, yet *believing*, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.' There, 'at His right hand, are joys, pleasures for ever-



more !' Because they are invisible and unknown, and 'pass man's understanding,' shall we call them visionary, unreal, &c. ? Or shall we attempt, with the authoress of this work, to incorporate things present and things future, time, and eternity, earth and heaven, the perishable and the imperishable, corruption and incorruption, mortal and immortality ; and so conjure up a 'fool's Paradise' wherewith to entice and tempt unspiritual, unconverted, and fanciful minds into the delusion that they love God and love His heaven, when they are reconciled to the thought of it only by discovering that it is not '*God's dreadful Heaven,*' but a fanciful region in which all they have loved and

delighted in upon earth, shall there be renewed, continued and intensified !

Surely none who have 'tasted that the Lord is gracious ;' none who know, by blessed experience, that there is 'consolation in Christ, and comfort in His love' (Philip. ii. 1) ; none in whose hearts 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' hath shined ; none, in fact, who know and love their Lord,—whose 'life is hid with Him,'—whose hopes are all centred in Him,—who live in Him and by Him, daily drawing out of His fulness ;—none such can for a moment receive such idle speculations as these. They are chaff, and believers possess the wheat. They are worse : they are as 'a serpent,'

poisoning the hopes of many, some day or other to sting like an adder! They know in whom they have believed; and He has prepared 'a crown of glory' for them in that day, and for all those who, mortifying all their human and earthly affections, 'love *His appearing*.' 'They will be *satisfied* when they awake in *His likeness*!' They want, they wish for, and desire no more!\*

\* There is another similar story-book published by the same author, the moral tendency of which is very questionable. It is whimsically styled 'Hedged in,' and its object seems to be to throw around woman's frailty such a dramatic interest that it appears rather as an amiable weakness.

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